

Arson fears grow after 6 more fires

By Harry Harris
The Tribune

Six "very suspicious" fires were set within a 10-block radius in Berkeley and North Oakland this week, leaving officials and residents fearful that the arsonist who has been plaguing Berkeley is expanding his territory.

Oakland fire inspectors said yesterday that preliminary investigations indicate the five Oakland blazes probably were the work of the person who has set at least 15 fires in Berkeley in the past month.

All the fires have been set by someone using a match or lighter to ignite combustibles already on the property, such as paper products, refuse, clothing or building materials.

The biggest of the Oakland

arson said residents in the area are being advised to "clean up, lock up and light up" their property.

Residents also should "watch

fires was a three-alarm blaze early yesterday that did \$140,000 damage to a three-story apartment house at 601 Alcatraz Ave., just south of the Berkeley city limits. The fire spread to a house next door, causing another \$10,000 damage.

While firefighters were battling those flames, two much smaller blazes were set nearby in a garage in the 500 block of North Street and in some lumber in the back yard of a home on 63rd Street.

On Tuesday, at about noon, some cardboard was ignited underneath a porch in the 2900 block of Lorina Street in Berkeley. Half an hour later and just a few blocks away, two small fires were set within a few doors of each other in the 6400 block of Raymond Street.

Neighbors was getting rid of a propane tank used for a barbecue while another was cleaning out his garage and basement.

That Berkeley fire brought to at least 15 the number of arsons in the area south of the University of California campus since Dec. 29. One person has been injured and dozens displaced, and damage has been estimated at about \$750,000.

Berkeley policeman Mike Holland said the police and fire department investigation of the fires is continuing, but there is no end in sight.

"There's nothing new as far as suspects," he said.

The fire at the Alcatraz Avenue apartment, built around the turn of the century and described by Assistant Fire Chief Don Matthews of Oakland as a beautiful building with gabled roofs and cupolas, started about

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currently on a \$50,000 fund-raising drive, "Gracie," of San Francisco, California, is a member of the "Above Right: An

11:45 p.m. Wednesday.

Matthews said someone ignited some clothing and other materials underneath a rear stairway and the flames "went roaring up into the attic" of the wood frame building.

Five residents of the building were forced out by the flames, which also severely burned the side of the home at 605 Alcatraz, causing the occupants there to flee as well.

Although some of the firefighters at the scene had to leave to battle the two smaller fires, all were under control by 12:15 a.m. yesterday.

The fires Tuesday scorched some tires on a car and destroyed some lumber, but the value of the damage was minimal.

Oakland fire inspector Don Iverson said residents in the area are being advised to "clean up, lock up and light up" their property.

Residents also should "watch

out not only for their own homes but their neighbors' as well" and report the presence of any suspicious persons, he said.

Several residents spent yesterday heeding the fire department's advice and were removing possible combustibles from their property.

The rash of fires has disturbed the usual serenity in the neighborhood of well-kept homes and tree-lined streets just a few blocks from the Berkeley border.

Jason Mevi, 21, one of the apartment residents routed by the fire, agreed there was "a little bit of fear" in the neighborhood.

"Basically people are in shock," he said. "It's a fairly safe neighborhood. We're not used to arsonists."

A few doors down the street, Thomas Mann Jr., 67, a retired postal supervisor, said one of his neighbors was getting rid of a propane tank used for a barbecue while another was cleaning out his garage and basement.

~~MON~~ MAR 2 - 1985

Police, fire officials meet on strategy

By Harry Harris
The Tribune

The arsonist plaguing North Oakland and South Berkeley struck again three times early yesterday, causing only minor damage but further kindling major emotions that range from fear to anger in the neighborhoods.

The latest fires, set after midnight within 35 minutes of each other in a six-block area between Shattuck and Telegraph avenues, brought the two-month total from the man fire officials are calling the "Alcatraz Arsonist" to at least 22.

(The nickname stems from the fact that a few of the fires occurred along Alcatraz Avenue.)

Oakland fire officials are warning residents that there have been more than 40 arson fires in the past 45 days in an area running all the way from Telegraph to San Pablo avenues. Not all of those fit the Alcatraz Arsonist's pattern.

The latest blazes made good a psychologist's Thursday prediction that the arsonist, who officials believe is a man, would strike again.

"We are just frightened," said Halina Rueger, who has lived in the 6600 block of Dana Street for 30 years. A garage in the rear of a home just down the block from her was torched early Thursday.

"We don't know what attracts him," she said, adding that a neighborhood meeting is being planned.

Arson investigators from the Oakland and Berkeley police and fire departments held a joint meeting yesterday afternoon to determine how to cope with the pyromaniac. A second

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The cost of the Saudi program has been undeniably staggering. Without huge oil revenues, it is unlikely that anything like it could have been contemplated. The Saudi government gave farmers free land and paid half the cost of drilling wells and buying equipment. Costs not covered by the grants could be financed by interest-free loans.

meeting is planned Monday morning.

Oakland police Sgt. Dave Clark said the meeting produced some new ideas that "hopefully will help us in identifying someone soon."

Oakland firefighters began passing out hundreds of yellow flyers yesterday to residents in the affected area, which stretches from 63rd Street in Oakland to Dwight Way in Berkeley, and from Shattuck Avenue to Ellsworth Street.

"We need your help to stamp out the Alcatraz Arsonist!!," the flyers said. They urged anyone seeing fires being set to "call the Fire Department immediately at 911." Anyone acting suspiciously should be reported to Clark at Oakland Police Department, 273-3746, the flyer said.

The first fire yesterday started at 2:54 a.m. in a utility shed in the rear of a home in

the 2900 block of Hillegass Avenue in Berkeley.

A garage at the rear of a home in the 2900 block of Benvenue Avenue was also involved. Damage from the fires was set at \$1,700.

At 3:17 a.m. Oakland firefighters responded to a garage fire at the rear of a home in the 6400 block of Hillegass, just a few blocks from the Berkeley city line. That fire did \$2,500 damage.

In both cases, the arsonist had to walk up a driveway and cross the rear yard of the homes.

While those fires were being fought, some paper materials atop the hood of a 1981 Cadillac parked in a driveway in the 300 block of 63rd Street in Oakland were set ablaze, causing another \$2,500 damage.

There were no injuries in any of the fires.

Clark said the meeting of arson investigators produced

some new tactics that will be deployed but declined to elaborate.

He again urged residents in the area being targeted to clear their properties of combustibles such as paper products, lumber and other debris that the firebug can use to start fires.

The area is primarily residential, with wood and shingle houses and apartments with neat lawns and towering trees.

Longtime residents still predominate, although new families are moving in frequently. Despite some age differences, there is a general close-knit feeling. Many neighbors keep an eye on each other's properties, a practice on the increase since the fires.

Even before the flyers were distributed, some residents were clearing combustibles from their properties.

The general mood is one of concern although some resi-

dents express other feelings, too, including anger because the tranquility of their neighborhoods is being disturbed.

Rueger said neighbors usually keep an eye out for each other and that if there is anything you could call good about the situation it is that "everybody is alerted."

Kate Conrad, who also lives on Dana, said there was "concern but not intense anxiety." She said she thought the neighborhood would band closer together and keep a more careful eye out for things. "It's better to be overprotective rather than uncautious."

"I think we're all going to sleep lighter for awhile."

Carol Agrimson lives just down the street from yesterday's fire on Hillegass in Oakland and admits she is worried.

"Obviously this guy is pathetic," she said. "I don't feel angry but it does make me feel vulnerable."

Blazes kill 1, leave 7 homeless

By Harry Harris
The Tribune

TUE MAR 19 1985

Two separate Oakland fires killed a 74-year-old man and left seven people homeless early yesterday morning.

Alfred Smith, who had been incapacitated by a stroke, was found dead in the bedroom of his North Oakland home after the fire had been extinguished.

Firefighters said the residence on 47th Street was set ablaze just before 3 a.m. by an overturned portable heater. Smith's wife, Hazel, escaped the burning house and summoned help. The fire caused \$50,000 in damages.

Another fire, this one deliberately set, broke out at 5:29 a.m. in West Oakland, destroying a converted duplex and severely damaging an adjacent church and grocery store on Willow Street. Seven people were left homeless by the five-alarm blaze, according to the fire department.

Neighbors credited a resident of the duplex with saving their lives by alerting them to the fire soon enough so that they could escape.

Some 80 firefighters, almost two-thirds of the on-duty firefighters in the city, battled the fire, which caused in excess of \$100,000 damage.

The fire broke out in the rear of 738 Willow Street, just a few blocks from the West Oakland BART station. Early morning BART riders were able to see the flames as their trains passed over Seventh Street.

Police Sgt. Dave Clark, of the arson detail, said someone unsuccessfully tried to set the same building afire last week. He said investigators yesterday were able to detect traces of an accelerant at the rear of the building. He would not comment as to a motive.

The fire, fed by the building's wood frame,

quickly spread to the other half of the structure at 744 Willow and flames were soon leaping out 15 to 20 feet.

The fire was finally brought under control at 6:20 a.m. but not before the buildings to the north and south suffered damage.

The structure to the south, at 732 Willow, housed the 75-member Westside Missionary Baptist Church and the Cooper Brothers Grocery Store is to the north.

The church's assistant pastor, Isaac Levay, lived in an apartment over the church and was forced out by the flames, which he said "were jumping out the windows" next door.

The church is looking for temporary quarters and also donations to help with repairs.

Sharon Kennedy, 34, a convalescent hospital nurse, had lived at 738 Willow about a year with her 17-year-old daughter, Tonia, and her 67-year-old mother, Eleanor Kennedy.

Sharon Kennedy said she was awakened by her daughter, who had seen flames coming from underneath the rear of the house.

She immediately knocked on her neighbors' door and yelled fire to alert them before making it to safety with her daughter and mother.

She said all the lights in the house were out but she was still able to see smoke "and feel the heat come up under the floor."

Even though almost all of her family's personal belongings were destroyed, Kennedy said the main thing was that no one was injured.

As to her plans now, she said simply: "Start over, I guess."

Bessie Davis, 45, who has lived at 744 Willow for almost two years, said if it hadn't been for Kennedy alerting them to get out "we wouldn't be alive now."

Oakland-Berkeley line heats up with arson

By Harry Harris
The Tribune

AN ARSONIST MAR 1 1985
An arsonist who has been stalking North Oakland and South Berkeley for two months struck twice early yesterday, bringing his fiery toll to at least 19.

The latest blazes prompted San Francisco psychologist Dr. Chris Hatcher to comment that the firebug — who gets a sexual-like "release" from setting the blazes, he said — is no longer able to control himself and will continue setting fires.

Oakland police and fire officials said the latest targets were two garages within a block of each other. The fires were set minutes apart, using materials already in the detached garages. No one was injured.

The first fire, in the 6600 block of Dana Street, flared at 2:07 a.m. and was brought under control in 10 minutes.

While firefighters were there, another blaze was set in the 6300 block of Telegraph Avenue. That fire was reported at 2:26 a.m. and was brought under control at 2:42 a.m. Six occupants of the apartment building served by the garage were evacuated as a precaution.

Battalion Chief Reg Garcia

Hatcher said achieving that

said the fires did more than \$20,000 damage.

A witness saw a man matching the composite drawing of the arson suspect fleeing from the scene of the Telegraph Avenue blaze, Garcia said.

Officials in the two cities are convinced the same person is responsible for at least 19 fires dating back to Jan. 19, and possibly as many as a half-dozen more because of the general area in which they were set, the way they were set, and the types of structures targeted.

The area is generally from Dwight Way in Berkeley south to 63rd Street in Oakland and from Shattuck Avenue to Ellsworth Street. All have been set using materials on the premises, such as lumber, papers and other debris and most have been wood frame structures.

Because of the arsonist's propensity for using materials at hand, Oakland Fire Lt. Mike White said firefighters would again be distributing fliers urging residents to clean up their property and notify police of suspicious people.

White said it appeared the arsonist "was getting defensive again" after a period of bold-

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6621 Dana St. and 6322 Telegraph Ave., Oakland.

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ness. He said that before yesterday's fires the arsonist had been striking during times when there were more people present and in parts of property more visible to passersby.

But yesterday's fires were in the early morning and in the rear of the properties.

He said local officials are considering submitting evidence they have collected to get a psychological profile done of the arsonist.

The concern that the arsonist will continue to strike is a legitimate one, according to Hatcher, an expert on pyromaniacs who works at the Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute at the University of California San Francisco.

He and local authorities say there is nothing in the attacks to indicate a profit or revenge motive.

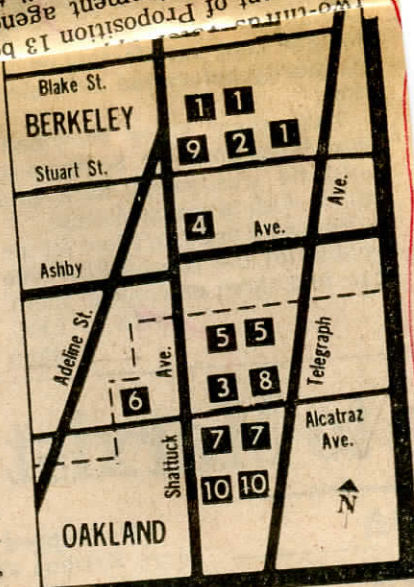
Therefore, Hatcher says, the man setting the fires here has developed "an emotional relationship" with the fires that has become an obsession.

Setting the fires causes a release of tension and agitation that is comparable to sexual gratification, he said.

The release the person gets from watching the fires "is a very primitive type of thing."

Hatcher said achieving that release also provides the arsonist with a "sense of power" because he generates "fear, excitement and concern."

From the patterns of fires so far, Hatcher said, it appears the arsonist is "really being driven" by his impulses and cannot control them.



By Frank Pennock Jr./The Tribune

Map shows area of fires in Oakland and Berkeley authorities definitely believe were set by the same person. 1: Jan. 19, all in Berkeley — 2330 Stuart St., 2205 Blake St., 2739 Fulton St., 2230 Blake, 2127 Dwight Way, 2537 Fulton. 2: Jan. 20 — 2725 Stuart St., Berkeley. 3: Jan. 25 — 475 Alcatraz Ave., Oakland. 4: Jan. 29 — 2912 Lorina St., Berkeley. 5: Jan. 29 — 6509 and 6412 Raymond St., Oakland. 6: Jan. 30 — 601 Alcatraz Ave., Oakland. 7: Jan. 31 — 546 North St. and 551 63rd St., Oakland. 8: Feb. 7 — 6425 Irwin Ct., Oakland. 9: Feb. 17 — 2111 Stuart St., Berkeley. 10: Feb. 28 — 6621 Dana St. and 6322 Telegraph Ave., Oakland.

He believes other Berkeley street people know who the arsonist is and should come forward to help stop him.

If not, he is convinced the fires will continue.

Eastbay arson suspect arrested fleeing from fire

WED SEP 30 1987

By Harry Harris
The Tribune

A pizza parlor employee was accused by police yesterday of being the "Alcatraz Arsonist" who is suspected of setting dozens of fires in Berkeley and Oakland in the past three years.

David Wayne Palmer, 25, was arrested about 3 a.m. Sunday as he ran from a fire in the Adams Point area of Oakland, where he has been living the past three months, police said.

Palmer was charged yesterday with 11 Oakland fires and is expected to be charged with at least 14 Berkeley fires, police said.

Police in both cities said more charges could be added as they complete their investigations.

The Oakland arsons with which Palmer is charged include three that occurred on Jan. 30, 1985, one of which damaged a house in the 600 block of Alcatraz Avenue. A second fire



David Wayne Palmer
'Had lots of matches'

burned a woodpile on the 500 block of 63rd Street, just a few doors from where he was living

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Senate approves ban on

Continued from Page A-1

at the time.

The other eight arsons occurred in the Adams Point area, a mostly residential area of Oakland just north of Lake Merritt and all within walking distance of the Euclid Avenue apartment Palmer listed as his latest address, police said.

The first Adams Point arson with which Palmer is charged occurred last June 22. The latest fire was Sunday morning in a pool house on the 300 block of MacArthur Boulevard.

Palmer, who authorities said had "lots of matches in his pockets," was spotted and arrested by members of the Alameda County Arson Task Force, which is made up of representatives of the Alameda County District Attorney's Office and police and fire departments.

The Adams Point area has been under surveillance since Sept. 23 after evidence showed the fires were probably being set by the same person.

Oakland police Sgt. Dave Clark, a member of the task force, said yesterday Palmer has admitted his involvement in fires dating back to at least January 1985. He also has taken Oakland and Berkeley police on "tours," pointing out where he set the fires, Clark said.

Palmer conceded he "had a problem and needed help," but, "he didn't know why he set the fires," Clark said.

Police began attributing the fires to the "Alcatraz Arsonist" because many of them occurred on or a short distance from Alcatraz Avenue in South Berkeley and North Oakland.

More than 20 deliberately set fires between late December 1984 and mid-March 1985 were attributed to the same person.

Most of the fires were set in the late night or early morning hours, usually within a short time and distance of each other. All were started by the use of readily available combustibles, such as paper, trash or wood.

Clark said that an anonymous caller gave police Palmer's name as a possible suspect in March 1985 and that Palmer voluntarily came in for questioning.

At that time, he denied involvement in any of the fires. Investigators, having no evidence, could not arrest him.

Clark said the arsons ceased after Palmer was sentenced to a year in jail in June 1985 following his conviction for a Berkeley burglary.

After his release from jail, Palmer lived for a time at the Euclid Avenue apartment before moving to Santa Cruz earlier this year.

Palmer returned to Oakland around June and moved in with some friends at another apartment in the same building on Euclid Avenue.

they do not belong in a shopping center.

Palmer's roommates, who described him as a friendly person with an avid interest in music, were in a state of shock yesterday over his arrest.

One roommate, a 21-year-old man who didn't want his name used, said he first met Palmer when they worked together at a Berkeley pizza parlor where Palmer was at one time assistant manager.

"I thought I knew the guy," the roommate said. "It just totally blows my mind. I didn't think he was capable of anything like that."

He said that although Palmer didn't exhibit any fascination with fire or discuss any personal problems, he did mention the 1985 questioning by police.

The roommate said Palmer claimed he had been "railroaded" and had nothing to do with the 1985 fires.

"I believed it at the time," the roommate said.

News of the arrest brought relief to residents in the areas where the arsons occurred.

Annette Floystруп, a Rockridge Community Planning Council member, said the arsons "had a lot of people frightened," mainly because they were set randomly.

Fire, Floystруп said, is a "scary thing because the potential for someone being killed is always there. Property you can replace. A life you can't."

9 more counts of arson filed against suspect in dozens of blazes

THU OCT 1 1987

By Harry Harris
The Tribune

Nine additional counts of arson were filed yesterday against a pizza parlor worker police say is the "Alcatraz Arsonist."

One of the charges against suspect David Wayne Palmer, 25, alleges that he set a fire at a Berkeley house where he used to live with his family.

The new charges — all for Berkeley arsons dating back to January 1985 — bring to 20 the total arson counts against Palmer, who was arrested early Sunday morning as he allegedly ran from a fire in the Adams Point area of Oakland, where he had been living the past three months.

The neighborhood had been under surveillance since Sept. 23 by members of the Alameda County Arson Task Force after the Oakland Fire Department concluded a rash of fires in the area were all being set by the same person.

Eight of the Oakland counts against Palmer stem from fires in the Adams Point area, all within walking distance of the Euclid Avenue apartment where he was living.

Palmer, who works at a pizza parlor near Durant Street and Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, was charged Tuesday with 11 Oakland arsons that also date back to January 1985.

Authorities said yesterday they believe Palmer is possibly responsible for as many as 80 Oakland and Berkeley fires dating back to 1982 that caused several hundred thousands of dollars in damage.

However, because the statute of limitations has expired on many of those crimes and because of a lack of evidence, only 20 counts of arson have been filed so far.

The charges are the result of admissions made by Palmer, who took Oakland and Berkeley police on a tour of sites where some of the fires occurred, said Alameda County Assistant District Attorney Stacy Walthall.

Oakland police Sgt. Dave Clark said yesterday Palmer has told police he set fire to a garage at a friend's house in Albany in 1973 after becoming angry at the friend.

Palmer also told police he set

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- Sept. 20, 1987: grass lot, 261 Fairmont
- Sept. 8, 1987: apt. house, 356 Adams
- Sept. 8, 1987: apt. house, 243 Orange

a series of fires at a camping area in 1978, Clark said.

No charges have been filed in those cases.

Police said Palmer, whose parents divorced when he was a child, told investigators "he didn't know why he set the fires."

One of the arsons he was charged with yesterday occurred in a shed alongside a house on the 2900 block of Hillegas Street in Berkeley, where Palmer lived for a time with his family while growing up.

Clark said investigators believe Palmer set many of the 1985 fires in North Oakland and South Berkeley while he walked home from work.

Firefighters began attributing the blazes to the "Alcatraz Arsonist," so-called because many of the fires occurred along or a short distance from Alcatraz Avenue near the Oakland-Berkeley city limits.

All the fires were started by the use of readily available combustibles, such as paper, trash or wood being set ablaze.

When Palmer was arrested early Sunday, authorities found "boxes and books of matches in

Firefighters began attributing the blazes to the "Alcatraz Arsonist," so-called because many of the fires occurred along or a short distance from Alcatraz Avenue near the Oakland-Berkeley city limits.

Palmer is charged with these fires:

■ OAKLAND FIRES

- Jan. 30, 1985: house, 601 Alcatraz Ave.
- Jan. 30, 1985: wood pile, 557 63rd St.
- Jan. 30, 1985: garage, 546 North St.
- June 27, 1987: house, 220 Lee St.
- Sept. 8, 1987: apt. house, 243 Orange
- Sept. 8, 1987: apt. house, 356 Adams
- Sept. 20, 1987: grass lot, 261 Fairmont
- Sept. 21, 1987: apt. house, 356 Adams
- Sept. 21, 1987: apt. house, 305 Oakland Ave.

- Sept. 23, 1987: tree, 208 Oakland Ave.

- Sept. 27, 1987: pool house, 383 MacArthur

■ BERKELEY FIRES

- Jan. 19, 1985: apt. house, 2739 Fulton St.
- Jan. 19, 1985: car, 2230 Stuart St.
- Jan. 19, 1985: shed, 2205 Blake St.
- Jan. 19, 1985: house, 2426 Fulton St.
- Jan. 19, 1985: dumpster, 2127 Dwight Way
- Jan. 22, 1985: apt. house, 2431 Oregon
- Jan. 22, 1985: laundry, 1732 Berkeley Way
- March 1, 1985: shed, 1921 Hillegas
- April 12, 1986: trash, 2931 Ellsworth

his pockets," Clark said.

Palmer, who is being held in lieu of \$113,000 bail at the Oak-

land City Jail, is scheduled to enter a plea to the charges today in Oakland Municipal Court.